

STATEMENTS
AND
SPEECHES



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DISCOURS

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"HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT"

Notes for a speech by
the Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
to the International Conference on Human Rights

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One year ago today, the polls were closing in Namibia. Democracy had just been tried there for the first time. And it worked. The Constituent Assembly chosen in that election went on to draft one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. And independence came to the last colony in Africa. That experiment in democracy was a victory for Namibia, a success for the United Nations, and a signal to Southern Africa that democracy could be secured peacefully, through partnership.

That same day Berliners from East and West were celebrating in their streets and climbing over the barrier which had once divided them. What was once a wall had become a gate. People had proven stronger than barbed wire, more powerful than dictators and secret police.

And next week, the leaders of 34 countries will gather in Paris at a CSCE Summit which is the consequence of that wall coming down. That Summit will signal a Europe whole, prosperous and free, where democracy and human rights are no longer concepts which divide, but a reality which unites.

Those events frame a year of extraordinary accomplishment. Never have there been such grounds for optimism that the observance of human rights around the world will become more the rule and less the exception. And never have so many societies embraced democracy -- in Europe, in Latin America, in Asia and Africa -- some for the first time and some once again.

But this is not a time to be complacent. The process is just beginning. In some countries, walls have been torn down -- real walls and walls of the mind. But new structures remain to be built. It is easier to tear down than to build up. And there is the danger that if new systems fail to improve lives quickly, democracy will be blamed and human rights could be threatened again.

And in so many other parts of the world, walls remain. Walls of power and poverty. Walls which deprive people of their most basic rights, walls which divide societies between those who rule and those who suffer. Walls which consign whole sectors of society to an existence barely worth the name. The fact that some battles have been won tells us that there are many battles yet to fight, many victories yet to declare.

What has happened in Eastern Europe -- and in Latin America and in Asia -- is the realization that human rights and democracy are not luxuries, nor are they the result of being developed or wealthy. They are conditions which make wealth develop.

It has been tempting for some to claim that peoples and governments have come to embrace democracy and human rights because they believe their old systems were immoral or illogical. I believe that perspective is wrong. Those societies have rejected other systems and other approaches because they did not work; they did not deliver. They denied people food for the body or for the spirit. The challenge is to ensure that the new systems work better.

Governments in the new democracies may recognize that societies which suppress are systems which self-destruct. They may accept that systems which deny prosperity are systems which will always be poor. They may know that societies which deprive human rights in the interest of social peace are societies where that peace is only a truce. But their citizens will draw other conclusions if these new experiments don't work either. If people become frustrated, if prosperity remains but a promise, if democracy does not deliver, there is a real danger of a return to the old ways, to the old regimes.

What is critical here is that human rights and democracy must be seen, not as a change in style, but as key components of societies which work, societies which are stable and prosperous. Otherwise, human rights and democracy could fall away as quickly as they have arisen.

Those of us who come from societies where prosperity has come with freedom and stability has come with democracy have an obligation. It is an obligation to prove that what we have said is universal in theory can be made universal in practice. It is an obligation to assist -- not as preachers but as partners.

That effort will come from attitudes and from action. That effort will also come from knowing both what to do and what not to do.

First, we must avoid the easy error of declaring that we have models to mimic. Our societies have developed the way they have for particular reasons which lie in history, in tradition and in culture. Our democracies were not delivered to us like prefabricated housing. They were home-grown. And because they were home-grown, they grew firm roots.

And our democracies themselves vary considerably. From the social democracy of Sweden to the traditions of Westminster to the unfettered capitalism of the United States, we ourselves are not uniform. We cannot expect others to be.

Second, we must avoid impatience and the search for instant perfection. Democracies which are developing will not be perfect from day one. Human rights which are new will not be adhered to at the outset with the rigour we would all like. That does not mean we develop excuses or ignore abuses. It simply means we must be sensible in our expectations, and realistic in our demands.

Our own achievements were secured over centuries. We cannot ask others to do in days what we have done over decades. And we must always bear in mind that democracy is developing here too, that none of us is perfect and that all of us are prey to poverty, intolerance, propaganda and prejudice.

Third, we must move beyond rhetoric. It is easy to be a cheerleader or a critic. It is more difficult to be a companion or a friend. When countries choose to move towards options we have championed, we must offer them practical, potent help in practising what we have so long preached.

But there is another issue too, and that is the question of what assistance we should offer. I think it is now recognized that societies which are not democratic are unlikely to become developed. But the opposite is also true. Societies which are underdeveloped are unlikely to become democratic. We must act accordingly.

That means we cannot demand democracy and deny development. It means we cannot expect people to cherish ballots when their stomachs are empty. Effective development assistance is far more valuable in promoting democracy and human rights than any admonition from the West. Democracy is not secured by building parliament buildings or observing polling booths. Democracy and human rights require a foundation of belief and a foundation of development.

So the tools of development are also the tools of democracy and human rights. Teaching people to read helps them develop but it is also a step towards democracy. Making people productive fights poverty, but it is also a step towards other human rights. Helping women in development helps families become more prosperous and makes societies more just, but it also deflects prejudice and inequality.

Fourth, we must recognize the wide variety of factors required to make democratic systems work. Democracies are based on the rule of law -- fairly and justly applied. The establishment of legal institutions and processes is crucial to democratic development and the West can assist.

Equally, democracies require freedom of the press. They require an impartial and professional civil service. And they require freedom of speech and assembly. Helping build the institutions and the expertise to support those fundamentals is a task for development assistance which also builds democracy.

Fifth, we must face squarely the issue of the conditions we put on development assistance. This is not an easy question. It often poses the difficult choice between supporting human rights and fighting poverty. I believe people should not be punished for regimes they do not support, regimes which are punishing them already. We may abhor governments and detest regimes but that distaste should not become a prejudice against people.

That does not mean there are no limits. There must be fundamental standards which cannot be discarded. Regimes must know that tolerance is not total and that if they insist on inhumanity as a systematic tool of governance, there will be consequences from the world which watches.

Canada's development assistance effort reflects that approach. We look at human rights records in deciding on the level of aid we give and on what type of aid that should be. But we do not expect societies which have been prisons to become perfect overnight. So we look for trends of improvement and we review those trends annually.

In addition, as an alternative to the severance of aid, we will often alter the type of assistance given. If a regime becomes a systematic, gross and continuous abuser of human rights, we will cease to deal with that regime. But we will not cease to deal with the people as long as they can be reached. We will not add to their suffering. So what we do is work through local organizations -- churches and NGOs -- to allow help to get through without helping those governments. I admit that this does not always work perfectly. But I believe it is morally correct.

Sixth, I think we must avoid delivering development assistance as if we were rewarding horses in a race. There are real reasons why some societies are able to develop their democracies and human rights practices more quickly than others. And one of those reasons can be their level of development. If democracy becomes the central criterion for development assistance, we could end up rewarding the wealthy and punishing the poor.

Seventh, we must recognize that there can be a contradiction between our demand for democracy and our insistence on structural adjustment. Structural adjustment, if crudely designed and

bluntly applied, can itself erode the roots of democracy and human rights. Structural adjustment is necessary if societies are to develop seriously and if they are to grow without destructive inflation. But our financial institutions should act in partnership with developing countries to ensure that structural adjustment preserves the social foundations for future growth.

Eighth, we must recognize the crucial importance of partnership in building democracy and strengthening human rights. Just as democracies do not work if they are imposed, so too democracy is only maintained if all elements of society are involved. Equally, governments do not have all the answers. Resources, expertise and experience are present throughout society and should be drawn on.

Partnerships within societies can be encouraged by partners abroad.

That is why the Canadian government established the independent International Centre for Democratic Development and Human Rights in Montreal.

That is also why we emphasize democracy and human rights in regional organizations of which we are a part. Last June, we proposed a Unit for Democratic Development within the Organization of American States to provide expertise and assistance to countries which are on the democratic path. That proposal was accepted. Through the Commonwealth High Level Appraisal Group we are working to establish a similar capacity within the Commonwealth Secretariat. We are exploring similar ideas for La Francophonie and are encouraging the Group of Experts on Judicial and Judiciary Co-operation to take an active role in promoting both human rights and democratic development.

Those regional units can provide a wide range of potential assistance and support including:

- facilitating the exchange of information and expertise;
- developing an inventory of experts on democratic systems and institutions;
- developing regional standards and procedures for elections;
- organizing electoral observer missions;
- co-operating with other regional and multilateral organizations; and
- fostering dialogue within those regions on democratic principles and values.

In Europe, Canada took the lead in Copenhagen at the CSCE Conference on the Human Dimension in proposing strengthened commitments and the rights of minorities. We are currently discussing an office for free elections and democratic institutions as part of the new CSCE structure. And we have encouraged NATO to adopt programs -- including scholarships -- which will allow it to share its democratic experiences with its old adversaries.

In addition, we have established a Political Co-operation Fund as part of our Program of Assistance for Central and Eastern Europe. That fund will provide grants and contributions to foster dialogue and co-operation with those countries so as to encourage democratic institutions, political pluralism, the rule of law and the respect of human rights.

In the past year alone, Canada has assisted in elections in Romania, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. We sent election observers to Namibia and provided 100 RCMP officers to help ensure stability as that society moves towards democracy. We are currently helping Benin as it moves away from totalitarianism. We have agreed in principle to participate in a Commonwealth observer mission for Guyana and have sent election observers last month to Malaysia through the Commonwealth. We participated in the OAS and UN efforts in Nicaragua, are working with both these organizations in the upcoming elections in Haiti, and are prepared to assist the UN in constructing democracy in the Western Sahara and Cambodia.

Those activities relate to elections. But we are providing other types of assistance beyond the mechanics. In South Africa, we are assisting that country move towards a multiracial democracy. Canadian expertise is being offered to all parties. But in order to level the playing field, we are providing financial support to the black majority to conduct constitutional research, consultations and development. In addition, we are supporting a two-year research project on constitutional development in a post-apartheid South Africa, a project being led by a Canadian professor in criminology.

There are other areas where human rights and democratic development can be furthered.

Literacy is one. Increasing literacy provides a better ability to participate in political and economic life. Canada is already involved in this area and will continue to be, particularly for women and children who are the major victims of illiteracy.

A free media is a second area for action. An independent press is an important element in combating corruption and the abuse of human rights and in promoting and preserving freedom of speech and association. Canada has hosted journalists from many developing countries in the past. I believe there may be avenues for new initiatives in this area including assistance and dialogue on such matters as media ethics, the organization of a free press and media law.

A third area may be the institution of ombudsmen. Ombudsmen provide people with redress against legal abuse. The Canadian experience with this institution may be an area of interest to other countries.

A fourth area is public administration. A civil service which is excellent and impartial and well trained is key to ensuring the implementation of, and respect for, the rule of law which lies at the heart of democracy.

A fifth area is police training. Canada has established a unique program in Namibia, where we are following up our contribution to the UN effort with an initiative which involves training the Namibian police force to train themselves. Professional police, well trained in the law, reinforce a commitment to democracy and human rights.

These are not grand designs and they do not in and of themselves convert despotism into democracy. They are small steps. But that is how democracy is built and that is how we can move forward. Such steps educate, they build institutions and trust -- and in so doing they make democracy strong and human rights more secure.

Democracies are not inherently peaceful. But societies which are free and developed are less likely to choose war as a common course of action. In the global village we have become, it is in the interest of everyone that incentives to conflict be reduced and that the stakes in peace be strengthened.

The Cold War distorted our priorities and led us to neglect global problems. With the Cold War over, the world may at long last see freedom and justice for all as a factor for security, not just a frill for the few.

The pursuit of human rights and democracy is central to Canadian foreign policy. It is a commitment which comes from what Canada is. Canadians sometimes denigrate their own accomplishments. But what we have built here is unique. It is worth preserving and it is worth sharing. We have built a

community by inviting the world to come and share our luck. We have built a democracy with millions who have fled tyranny for freedom. We have built a nation which Barbara Ward once called "the first international country." We have done that through tolerance, through compromise and through understanding. And we have built a democracy and a structure of human rights which, while not perfect, are something others dream to share.

The world outside recognizes the Canadian commitment to justice and human rights, the Canadian achievement. Nelson Mandela does. The Soviet refuseniks do. The governments of China, of Sri Lanka, of Nicaragua, of Kenya and of Haiti have. That commitment will continue and strengthen. It is central to our values and sustains our spirit. Our goal is a world where justice knows no borders and human rights no caveat.